



General Assembly

Fifty-eighth session

Official Records

Distr.: General

9 July 2004

English

Original: Spanish

Fourth Committee

Summary record of the 14th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 27 October 2003, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Loedel. (Uruguay)

Contents

Agenda item 86: Questions relating to information

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

03-58027 (E)



The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Agenda item 86: Questions relating to information
(A/58/21, A/58/175, A/58/16 (chap. III.B, programme 23) and A/58/90, annex)

1. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) said that the world was living at an interesting epoch that could be compared to a crossroads. In determining the road that should be followed in order to attain the objectives of the international community, public-information activities would acquire an increasingly important role.
2. Much of what the peoples of the world knew about the work of the Organization had been communicated to them by way of the Department of Public Information through the recording and distribution of video images of Security Council meetings, the production and distribution of radio programmes, the publication of information on the United Nations website, the preparation of daily information bulletins distributed by e-mail to 18,000 journalists, writers and researchers worldwide, the preparation of guidance material for senior United Nations staff, the conduct of information campaigns in the communications media, the writing of opinion articles, the management of library services, the organizing of meetings with representatives of civil society, guided tours of United Nations Headquarters and educational programmes such as the Cyberschoolbus project.
3. The Department had undergone a major restructuring following the Secretary-General's comprehensive review of its structure and management called for by the General Assembly in its resolution 56/253. The Assembly had steered that process through its resolutions 57/130 B and 57/300, in which it had welcomed the Secretary-General's proposals to improve public information activities.
4. Of key importance in the Secretary-General's reform proposals presented to the Fourth Committee in September 2002 were the refocusing of the Department's message, the refining of its structure and the retooling of its operational outlets. The Department had developed a more strategic orientation and a more focused work programme. It had a strong new mission statement, a new operating model, and a new organizational structure that divided the Department's work among three divisions: the Strategic Communications Division, which incorporated the

Information Centres Service and the network of United Nations information centres and services, the News and Media Division; and the Outreach Division, which included the Dag Hammarskjöld Library.

5. In order to translate that renewed operating model into programmatic terms, the subprogramme structure of section 28, "Public Information", of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004–2005 had been changed. The new subprogramme structure enabled the Department to meet the request of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) for aligning the Department's organizational structure with its four subprogrammes. Thus, the subprogramme of strategic communications services was now related to the work of the Strategic Communications Division, the subprogramme of news services now related to the work of the News and Media Division, and the subprogrammes for both library services and outreach services now related to the work of the Outreach Division. As a result, beginning in January 2004 it would be easier to identify the budget allocations for each of the four subprogrammes.
6. The Secretary-General's report (A/58/175) did not contain a detailed list of all the Department's activities but focused instead on the reform process and the steps taken during the period July 2002 to July 2003. During the past 12 months the foremost public-information challenge facing the United Nations had been the lapse of confidence in the Organization following the Iraq war. The political action at the United Nations during the crisis had caused the Organization to be subjected to intense and critical media and public scrutiny. In May a poll conducted in 20 countries by the Pew Organization had found that the prestige of the United Nations had declined everywhere: in the United States of America because the United Nations had not supported the war, and in other countries because it had failed to prevent that conflict.
7. The Department had used every means at its disposal to increase global awareness and understanding of the multiple roles the United Nations had played in the Iraq crisis and to ensure that important United Nations activities in many other critical areas were not forgotten. At the same time, the Department had established an inter-agency task force to coordinate the process of information-gathering and to establish a precise and coherent joint communications strategy, which provided senior United Nations staff members with periodic guidance

and subjects to discuss with the communications media. The Department had also established an information centre at Amman, Jordan.

8. Although the role of the task force had now been subsumed into the weekly United Nations Communications Group meetings chaired by the Department, guidance was still being disseminated globally to United Nations staff. The Organization's response to the constantly evolving political and media environment had been the subject of a three-day workshop organized by the Department at Headquarters in September 2003 and attended by communications specialists of the United Nations system posted in the Middle Eastern and the Arab region. At the same time, redoubled effort had been made to ensure that development issues and peacekeeping activities in other parts of the world received the attention they deserved.

9. During the general debate at the current session, a growing number of delegations had agreed that every effort should be made to strengthen the United Nations, inasmuch as it was the most appropriate forum for seeking collective solutions for common problems and challenges. Fortunately the coverage given by communications media to the opening of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly and to the general debate had been excellent. The comprehensive coverage of the Secretary-General's appeal to the international community to establish a unity of purpose based on a joint security programme had contributed to a resurgence of the search for a new United Nations approach to the most important problems of the twenty-first century.

10. The recently created Strategic Communications Division was responsible for establishing synergy between the Department of Public Information and its associates in the United Nations system, enabling the Department to use every means for disseminating the Organization's message. The work the Department had done in connection with the World Summit on the Information Society and its collaboration with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in connection with the United Nations Mission in Liberia were two good examples of cooperation in that sphere.

11. The United Nations website was an extremely effective and cost-efficient means for the dissemination of information, as demonstrated by the fact that in September 2003 there had been more than 11.69 million hits on the site in 24 hours, exceeding the total number of hits recorded for the entire year 1996.

On the basis of current data, the website was expected to receive 2 billion hits before the end of 2003.

12. He reaffirmed his commitment to multilingualism in his capacity as Coordinator for Multilingualism in the United Nations Secretariat. In that regard, the direct connection between the website and the Official Document System (ODS) and the initiation of the News Centre in the six official languages constituted an important advance in the attainment of greater linguistic parity among the official languages on the Web.

13. Live radio broadcasts were available almost immediately through the United Nations website and enabled people with Internet access to listen to United Nations News at any time of day. In view of the proven success and cost-effectiveness of live radio, the Department had asked for authority to make the project a permanent feature of its activities and would seek regular-budget funding for it for the biennium 2004-2005.

14. The Outreach Division's thrust was to maximize the multiplier effect provided by civil-society organizations. In that context, the Division's new Civil Society Service provided the Department with opportunities to establish new links for strengthening its relations with non-governmental organizations.

15. The restructuring of United Nations information centres by means of a three-year regionalization plan was already under way. On 31 December 2003 nine centres in Western Europe would be closed, to be replaced by a regional United Nations information centre at Brussels. That centre would enable the Department to consolidate all its West European assets so as to disseminate its message in the region more coherently and strengthen the ties between the United Nations and the European Union. It would also make it possible to centralize administrative and support functions, release assets for redeployment to priority areas and enhance multilingualism on the Department's website. It should be understood, however, that regionalization was not a "one size fits all" process. The Department would consider regional and national needs and would shortly commence consultations with Member States concerned on the creation of other regional centres, taking into account the special circumstances of developing countries. The results of those consultations would be presented to the Committee on Information at its twenty-sixth session as part of the report on the possible establishment of other regional centres.

16. The Department was also stepping up its efforts in the evaluation of its own activities through an intensive process of consultations with staff, and with the assistance of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). That evaluation was a key element of OIOS's efforts to institutionalize self-evaluation in the Secretariat within a framework of result-based management.

17. Those were some of the changes being made in the Department of Public Information. Change was always difficult, and doing things right required running some risks and evaluating the results. The Department was working hard to ensure that the voice of the United Nations would be heard loudly and clearly.

18. **Ms. Miller** (Jamaica), Rapporteur of the Committee on Information, submitted the Committee's report on its twenty-fifth session (A/58/21). The session had taken place at a time of critical world events that had raised serious doubts about the relevance and future of the United Nations. However, in the debate among the delegations there had been widespread agreement that in the context of current international relations, the world needed a stronger and more effective United Nations more than ever before. If the message of the United Nations was to be heard throughout the world, the activities of the Department of Public Information had to be made stronger and more focused, and with that goal in mind, the new operating model and organizational structure of the Department had been welcomed with great satisfaction.

19. The deliberations of the Committee had also emphasized the importance of making the Organization respect the diversity and cultural integrity of different civilizations and the need for bridging the digital divide. Attention had been given to the success of the United Nations website despite the disparity in the use of different languages, and that of the pilot project on the development of international radio broadcasting for the United Nations. Speakers had also discussed the issues of the regionalization of United Nations information centres, the strengthening of the Department's alliances with civil society and the integration of the libraries of the United Nations system. Lastly, the report included two draft resolutions entitled "Information in the service of humanity" and "United Nations public information policies and activities".

20. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh), Chairman of the Committee on Information, said that the past two years

had been a period of metamorphosis and renewal for the Department of Public Information. The Department had been given a new strategic orientation and had acquired innovative tools and new technologies which had helped to make it more flexible and effective. At the same time, the work of traditional means of communication had lost none of its importance, and radio was proving itself as useful as ever. Furthermore, the disparity in the use of different languages was being remedied and the United Nations News Centre was already operating in the six official languages.

21. In spite of all those important achievements, much still remained to be done in order to make the Department truly the voice of the United Nations. Meeting that goal required a good plan, sound leadership and the political and material support of Member States. The work of the Department would surely depend largely on how it organized itself but also on resource allocations that responded to its programmatic needs. Accordingly, he urged Member States to equip the Department appropriately, so that the Organization could be brought closer to the peoples of the world in the present trying times.

22. **Mr. Mantovani** (Italy), speaking on behalf of the European Union and its acceding countries (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia), the associated countries (Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey) and the European Free Trade Association countries that were members of the European Economic Area, reaffirmed the European Union's commitment to freedom of expression and information. The independence of communications media was fundamental, since it was usually the first victim of régimes that did not respect human rights and was a crucial element in democracy-building.

23. New technologies created new challenges, and the effectiveness of the Department of Public Information and its capacity to keep up with the latest technological advances should be strengthened. However, new technologies still remained an unattainable dream for much of the world's population, and the developing and developed countries needed to work together in order to overcome that disparity. The European Union was therefore very pleased to see that the Department's new mission statement reflected the guidelines set forth in the Millennium Declaration and focused on poverty, conflict prevention, sustainable development, human rights, the needs of the African continent and the battle against HIV/AIDS and against international terrorism.

24. Unrestricted access to information was fundamental for engaging people in democracy, and therefore the United Nations should integrate communication and information in its strategic management. The European Union reaffirmed its conviction that the Department must play an important role in achieving the main purposes of the United Nations. In that context, it welcomed the Department's efforts to prioritize its resources in order to ensure that the message of the United Nations was delivered with appropriate technology and appropriate communication tools, including its website.

25. The message of the United Nations should be delivered at the local level with a voice that could be easily understood by all citizens of the world. In that regard the countries for which he spoke recognized the praiseworthy efforts to put a range of valuable information on the Web in the six official languages, particularly at the United Nations News Centre. The enhancement of multilingualism as an integral part of the daily work of updating and developing the United Nations website was crucial to the Organization's ensuring a multilingual approach to public information.

26. In regard to the regionalization of the information centres with a view to rationalizing the Department's network and maximizing its reforms, the European Union had set the pace, accepting the Department's reduction plan that entailed the closing by 31 December 2003 of the nine existing centres and the creation of a regional United Nations information centre at Brussels. The European Union intended to follow up that process because it was convinced that rationalization would benefit the capacity to deliver information concerning United Nations activities in Western Europe and trusted that it would serve as an example for carrying out the process in other regions of the world.

27. Lastly, the European Union wished to reaffirm its strong condemnation of the use of violence to silence journalists or interfere with their work, as well as any attempts to control or influence the media with the aim of distorting or suppressing information or to use them for propaganda purposes.

28. Mr. Arrouchi (Morocco), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the ongoing reform of the Department of Public Information was a crucial and necessary step in strengthening the United Nations system. The Department, as the public voice of the Organization, should ensure a wider communication of United Nations activities that would

lead to a real interactive dialogue with the different actors of world society. The new Department should aim at stimulating a genuine reaction of the world's people to United Nations decisions in order to ensure that all the actors of society participated in realizing the objectives and goals of the Organization.

29. The Department's new mission statement, as emphasized by the Secretary-General, should be viewed as a new reinforced and action-oriented strategy of communication, to be guided by the priorities fixed in intergovernmental processes, in particular the Millennium Declaration. According to that Declaration, the eradication of poverty remained the greatest challenge facing the world community, and in that respect the Department's contribution to the building of an effective world strategy of partnership for real and effective sustainable development was of paramount importance.

30. Africa was the continent most severely affected by the scourge of poverty, famine, disease and armed conflicts, and therefore the Group of 77 and China welcomed the activities of the Department of Public Information to improve the work of the United Nations in supporting that continent's sustainable development; the Department's new communications strategy should promote concrete responses to the special needs of the peoples of Africa. It should be a long-term action-oriented strategy, and prominent among the subjects on which it should focus were dialogue between civilizations and the situation of the occupied Palestinian territories; the tragic evolution of that situation called for a reinforced and permanent outreach strategy aimed at stimulating strong action on the part of the international community to put the peace process back on track.

31. He reaffirmed the importance of United Nations information centres to developing countries, particularly the least developed countries, since they constituted a valuable source of information and means of communication and interaction with the host countries in which the acute shortage of infrastructure and human resources made it difficult for them to benefit from the new information and communication technologies. The restructuring of those centres should therefore be studied on a case-by-case basis and in consultation with the countries concerned, and it was important to preserve and consolidate the traditional means of communication, such as radio, which had a significant impact in remote areas, especially in developing countries.

32. The fulfilment of the Department's new mission statement depended to a great extent on ensuring the use of multilingualism in its communications activities. A wider outreach could be realized only through balanced and equitable use of the six official languages. The Group welcomed the Secretariat's efforts to that end and hoped that financial constraints would not continue to hinder them.

33. Lastly, the reform of the United Nations, which included a revision of the organizational structure and the operating model of the Department of Public Information, was a process that should be continuously enhanced and reinforced in order to make a contribution to the attainment of the Organization's goals.

34. **Mr. Alcalay** (Venezuela) expressed agreement with the positions taken by the Moroccan delegation on behalf of the Group of 77 and by the Peruvian delegation on behalf of the Rio Group and said that the present-day world, undergoing profound changes, required an integrated information and communication policy aimed at giving the peoples of the planet a clear view of the Organization's priorities, and especially its activities, since no matter what far-reaching social, institutional, political and economic changes the United Nations was bringing about, if it had no capacity to transmit its activities to the communications media throughout the world, it was as if they had accomplished nothing at all. To that end, Venezuela reaffirmed the importance of United Nations Radio, especially in the poorest countries, which could be reached very easily and economically through that medium.

35. Another priority area was information technology, which was indispensable for the dynamics of the present day. A problem in that area was the growing technological gap between rich and poor countries. In order to make information technology more effective, it was necessary to stimulate solidarity and strengthen both South-South and South-North cooperation with a view to reducing the differences in information technology. Venezuela was aware of the Organization's efforts to that end but believed that much more needed to be done, and it therefore hoped that the World Summit on the Information Society would clearly define the priorities and concrete goals for achieving the Millennium development objectives relating to information, communication and technological advances.

36. At the same time, the Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information needed the cooperation of other United Nations organs and entities, and new structures should be devised for increasing their interaction with organized civil society and the private sector. In that connection, he stressed the annual observance of World Press Freedom Day and the desirability of creating similar initiatives in other areas of information and communication.

37. **Mr. Balarezo** (Peru), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, agreed that the strengthening of the United Nations system was not an event but a process. Furthermore, that process should constantly provide machinery for reviewing and updating the policies pursued and the quality of the results. The Rio Group, which had at one point welcomed the restructuring of the Department, now welcomed the concrete form of the new organic structure and the new operating model, in which the various departments of the Secretariat were considered clients that established their own priorities, and was confident that such a pragmatic focus increased the Department's capacity to deliver correct, impartial, comprehensive and timely information.

38. The Group believed that the rationalization of the information centres should be studied in a differentiated and flexible manner, since not all regions of the world where such centres existed were in comparable situations. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean there were problems of distance and access to new technology. That process should include consultation with the States concerned, including those in which there were no information centres but which would inevitably be affected.

39. The Group attached great importance to the equal use and treatment of the official languages in public-information activities, including the Organization's websites, and it therefore urged the Department to continue its efforts to promote linguistic parity and welcomed the appointment of Mr. Tharoor as Coordinator for Multilingualism.

40. It was essential to continue using the traditional information media, and therefore the Group welcomed the Department's work aimed at the creation of synergies with the new technologies, as well as the actions taken to improve the management and integration of United Nations libraries.

41. Lastly, he reaffirmed the Rio Group's commitment to the construction of a new world information and communication order and hoped that

the Political Declaration and the Plan of Action to be adopted at Geneva on the occasion of the World Summit on the Information Society would be guided by a vision shared by rich and poor countries for the creation of equal opportunities that could benefit the people, making balanced use of information and communication technologies.

The meeting was suspended at 4.45 p.m. and resumed at 5.25 p.m.

42. **Mr. Assaf** (Lebanon) said that the Department of Public Information was the mirror that reflected the United Nations to the peoples of the world. In a world in which information had become a parameter of growth, it was through television, radio, printed publications and the Internet that people were educated about and made aware of subjects such as the prevention of conflicts, the dissemination of a culture of tolerance and the promotion of gender equality. Moreover, the Organization embraced causes related to justice for peoples, particularly the right of self-determination and the elimination of foreign occupation; in that connection the highest priority should be given to the question of Palestine.

43. Lebanon believed that the restructuring of the Department to apportion its activities among three divisions was in harmony with the reform of the Organization as a whole. The reform should be a continuing process, not a single event, and its results must be evaluated with a view to detecting any shortcomings in the Department with regard to its obligations to the public.

44. United Nations information centres were the voice of the Department in the field, and Lebanon hoped that the Department's plan to unify them into regional centres would be approached in a thoughtful and careful manner, giving due attention to the differences between developed and developing countries.

45. The United Nations website constituted an exemplary achievement, in view of the amount of data and documents that it offered, and public interest in that service was constantly growing. His Government welcomed the initiation of an Arabic-language news centre as part of the website, called for more effort aimed at providing integrated and accurate information on the site in the six official languages and reaffirmed the need for distributing financial and human resources equitably among the departments working with the various languages.

46. Turning to the digital divide and the role of traditional communications media, he said that the revolution in information and communication technologies had done much to promote globalization. The world was a global village, but the digital divide between developed and developing countries was enormous, and the United Nations should make greater efforts to bridge that gap, so that all States could benefit from information and communication technologies. Until that became a reality, the Department would have the task of revitalizing radio broadcasting, which was currently one of the most effective communications media in the developing countries. Although United Nations television services aimed at informing the world about the Organization's activities were praiseworthy, their coverage should be expanded, the number of programmes should be increased, and efforts should be made to avoid broadcasting the same programmes all the time.

47. **Mr. Al-Dhanhani** (United Arab Emirates) said that the outcomes of the reforms of the Department of Public Information had reflected positively on numerous information and media facilities and activities of the Organization, particularly the advance made in multilingualism, the strengthening of information services and activities to promote development in general and African development in particular. Those outcomes could also be seen in the increase in the number of persons who would benefit from the new information and communication technologies. In that connection, his delegation called once again for a redoubling of efforts to close the digital divide between advanced and developing countries and to strengthen measures needed to facilitate the use of information technology in developing countries in conformity with the Millennium Declaration. It also recommended that information should be used for bringing countries closer together and promoting understanding and tolerance and that the communications media should not use such information to spread hate, discrimination and prejudice. In that context, the Department of Public Information deserved praise for transmitting the message concerning the role of the Organization in the Iraq crisis and making people aware of the political and humanitarian aspects of that crisis. He expressed profound grief at the deaths of journalists in Iraq and Afghanistan while working in areas stricken by severe conflicts and hoped that all necessary steps would be taken to guarantee their safety and freedom in the performance of their work.

48. His Government was convinced of the important role played by communications media in the transmission of cultural messages and the advancement of understanding among different countries with a view to promoting peace and tolerance among them; it attached great importance to the strengthening of all information facilities in the country and had made substantial investments in information and communication technologies in order to create advanced information systems. It had also adopted the principles of freedom of expression within a framework that guaranteed the promotion of national, international and humanitarian issues, and it had, at the same time, applied a policy of understanding and tolerance towards other cultures and religions and promoted a culture of peace and solidarity among them. Guided by that perspective, it had signed treaties and memoranda of understanding with various fraternal and friendly countries throughout the world. It was proud of its advanced information system, and the State held annual expositions and conferences on communications media and information technology, the latest of which had been the Arab Summit on Information and Communication Technologies, held at Dubai in 2002.

49. His delegation welcomed the activities of the Department of Public Information to increase awareness of all aspects of the Palestinian problem and the situation in the Middle East and called for further strengthening all the information activities of communications media related to the problem, which the General Assembly had supported through the Information Programme on Palestine; that programme included the staging of exhibitions, the distribution of printed matter and the spreading of information on the suffering of the Palestinian people under the oppression of the Israeli occupation, until a just and permanent solution to the problem could be achieved.

50. **Ms. Baaziz** (Algeria) said that the importance of information and communication technologies was constantly increasing, since they constituted an instrument that helped to promote the development and advancement of mankind. Those technologies enabled completely isolated regions to communicate easily; they should benefit everyone, and therefore the Department of Public Information should guarantee all countries equitable access to the benefits of those technologies, in order to bridge the digital divide separating developed from developing countries. A world strategy to that end should be established, so as to develop the human and material structures of developing countries and attain an international

balance in the information sphere. Her delegation hoped that the World Summit on the Information Society would be able to remedy that situation. The Summit should achieve a consensus making it possible to share the advances of the technological revolution equitably and place them at the service of the Millennium development goals.

51. Respect for the diversity of means of expression in the United Nations system continued to be a matter of concern to many Member States, and therefore special importance should be attached to the promotion of multilingualism. The quality of the United Nations website's pages in the different languages and that of the News Centre's services were constantly improving. She reaffirmed her Government's support for giving equitable treatment to the six official languages in the preparation of the services provided by the United Nations on the Web and in the sphere of documentation and references, so that users would have access to substantial information and documentation.

52. The United Nations had an important role to play in promoting the principles of freedom of the press. It was therefore important to devote special attention to the training of journalists from countries of the South, especially those that were far behind the rest in the sphere of information and journalism.

53. Information on United Nations activities relating to decolonization was important for the attainment of the objectives of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. Her Government welcomed the initiatives of the Department of Public Information to provide information on that subject, and it hoped that the support of the available communications media would help the United Nations in liberating the last colonized peoples from the colonial yoke, so that they might exercise their right to self-determination.

54. Her Government attached great importance to the United Nations information centres, which were of great importance in the area of information, communication and documentation, in particular for the developing countries that had no technological resources; it therefore reaffirmed its support for those useful structures and called for providing them periodically with financial and human resources.

55. **Mr. Kabtani** (Tunisia) said that the growing digital divide between industrialized and developing countries necessitated action to ensure that the new horizons of the revolution in information and communication technology would be opened to all the

countries of the world. Aware of the importance of that subject, his Government had called for the holding of a world summit on the information society and was prepared to host the second stage of that summit, which would be held at its capital in November 2005, and to participate actively in the first stage, to be held at Geneva in December 2004. It would spare no effort to make the summit the appropriate time for preparing a world plan that would help strengthen cooperation between the members of the international community and promote the role of information and communication technologies in development.

56. The United Nations continued to play a crucial role in information and communications, both with regard to Member States and with regard to world public opinion, which was devoting more and more attention to the activities of the Organization. The world had witnessed profound transformations and violent events, and doubts had been raised concerning the function and usefulness of the United Nations. All Member States should therefore redouble their support for the efforts of the Department of Public Information to formulate a clear and firm United Nations information policy. It was natural that the Committee on Information should conduct the examination of the way in which that policy was applied and should endeavour to see to it that the measures the Secretary-General intended to take would have the support of Member States.

57. His Government supported the Under-Secretary-General's focus on reforming the Department of Public Information and strengthening its mandate. The reform should be carried out in an environment of complete transparency and in coordination with Member States. The Department must have a clear mandate and clear priorities that would guarantee optimal use of its resources, and its priorities must be in conformity with the United Nations Charter and the Millennium Declaration.

58. Having carefully read the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information, his delegation welcomed the valuable advances made in various spheres in implementing recommendations made by Member States, particularly the improvements in the United Nations website and the News Service in Arabic, and wished to express its support for the continuation of United Nations radio programmes.

59. He emphasized the great importance of United Nations information centres to developing countries and expressed the hope that the capacities of those

centres would be increased and strengthened by the economies that could be achieved by closing information centres in Western Europe and replacing them with a regional centre.

60. Lastly, he reaffirmed that his Government was prepared to cooperate with all Member States in achieving the desired goals, so that the Department of Public Information could continue to guide the dissemination of the Organization's message.

61. **Mr. Fadaifard** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that at the present time, more than ever before, the voice of the United Nations should be heard clearly and effectively. The appeals for collective responses to common problems and challenges, for multilateralism and participation, the eradication of poverty, the prevention of conflicts, sustainable development, human rights, dialogue between civilizations, the culture of peace and tolerance, the struggle against terror in all its forms and manifestations and decolonization were the world's common problems and challenges. All the peoples of the world should have an opportunity to hear that voice in one way or another, and for that reason there must be a very strong Department of Public Information speaking on behalf of the Organization.

62. His delegation associated itself with the statement made by Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China but wished to add that his country continued to support the vision and proposals of the Secretary-General to reorient the public-information activities of the United Nations and to restructure the Department. At the same time, it wished to reaffirm the fundamental role played by the Committee on Information in guiding the process of restructuring and repositioning the Department. That Committee should, in conformity with the mandate established by the General Assembly, play a fundamental role in United Nations public-information policies and activities, as it had done at its twenty-fifth session, by adopting a series of positive and constructive decisions on the process of restructuring and reforming the Department. His delegation wished to emphasize that in the process of reforming the Department, the recommendations contained in the resolution approved by the Committee at its twenty-fifth session should be taken into consideration. At the same time, it welcomed the fact that the Department was developing an annual programme-impact review in order to evaluate its activities systematically, with the support of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, and that the results of

the review would be studied at the twenty-sixth session of the Committee on Information.

63. His delegation attached the utmost importance to the role of United Nations information centres and was following with great interest the proposals made by the Secretary-General for restructuring and rationalizing the network of information centres around regional hubs. Reaffirming paragraph 15 of General Assembly resolution 57/300, which related to the process of rationalizing the work of United Nations information centres around regional hubs, it wished to stress in the implementation of that initiative other regions which were specified in that paragraph and also reaffirmed in paragraph 40 of resolution B of the Committee on Information, approved at its twenty-fifth session. In general, that question had raised many expectations and concerns among Member States. His delegation hoped that as a result of that review, the staff and the financial resources freed in high-cost developed countries would be transferred to the United Nations information centres in developing countries, in which it might be necessary to strengthen those activities. It also felt concern at the fact that that process was affecting the flow of information from United Nations information centres to developing countries. It hoped that at the twenty-sixth session of the Committee on Information the report on the implementation of the initiative to establish regional hubs would answer all the questions in that respect.

64. The dissemination of information in local languages and its effects on local populations were questions of special interest to his Government. He therefore urged the Department to assign resources and technical facilities to those countries whose languages were not official languages of the United Nations, so that they might prepare and expand web pages in local languages. It hoped that the current process of restructuring and reviewing the activities of the Department would strengthen its role and activities in spheres of special interest to the developing countries and that it would continue to help close the digital divide between developed and developing countries.

65. **Mr. Gallegos** (Ecuador) said that the content of communication and information policies was essential to the attainment of any objective. The United Nations, as a world organization, had a transcendental obligation to the international community with regard to public information. The activities of the United Nations were the result of steps taken by Member States, whose needs and interests determined the orientation adopted on the various items of the

international agenda. The international community needed to be informed about the development and results of that agenda. At the same time, Member States should be informed in an accurate and timely manner about the work of the Organization.

66. The technological changes occurring in recent decades and the rapidity of those changes meant that the response of the United Nations in the sphere of communication and public information was complex, especially as a result of the financial difficulties the Organization had had to face. Nevertheless, the efforts being made gave reason to believe that it was responding to such challenges in the best way possible. He stressed that the response should be directly related to the changes experienced in international reality during the past few years.

67. His delegation welcomed the efforts made by the competent organs with a view to total immersion of the United Nations in the world of information technology. Access to such technology and its efficient utilization were both important. It was evident that in the Organization such utilization meant not only placing state-of-the-art technology at the service of its own needs but also increasing the benefits that could be obtained in the financial sphere.

68. To ensure that the United Nations obtained better results, work would have to be done at the internal level. Implementation of the mandates for information required consolidation of the strategy in that area, and his delegation was pleased to see the various tools that had been prepared, such as the e-Meets system for managing meetings, or the tools being prepared for the future, such as the e-Conveyor for the electronic transmittal of documents. Similarly, it recognized there was a commitment to the process of updating the skills of staff members and representatives, which had been undertaken by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research.

69. With regard to services to the community, it was essential to recognize that some benefits could already be perceived. It was beyond doubt that the contents of the Organization's website pages were truly useful, since many of them, indeed almost the majority, were being published in a timely manner in all the official languages, making evident the universalization and democratization of information. All of those efforts would undoubtedly lead to the strengthening of the Organization's work, so that the steps taken could be justified by the dissemination of information, an aspect which, furthermore, constituted a sort of internal audit.

70. From the data provided by the relevant reports it could be concluded that changes had begun to become reality and the results would become visible gradually, thus fulfilling the mandates of the Committee on Information. It was therefore beyond doubt that technology had been placed at the service of the United Nations and of the pursuit of its lofty objectives.

71. It was important to mention the link between information and development. Although countries welcomed advances in information technology, they were concerned at the difficulties they experienced in accessing and implementing them. One of the mandates of the Committee on Information was promoting the establishment of a New World Information and Communication Order designed to strengthen peace and international understanding, and thus the strategies and activities of the Organization should take the disparities among Member States into account, in an obligatory and responsible manner, in order that it might truly achieve those objectives.

72. The steps to be taken in order to prevent inequalities from increasing included making countries with greater technological advances aware of the need to support countries with lesser capacities, in order to close the gap which, if it grew wider, would have a negative effect on their development. Moreover, there was a need to mobilize international cooperation focused on training, access to advanced information technologies, and the creation of technological elements that would match the special capacities of various countries.

73. One example was the fact that the World Summit on the Information Society was being promoted as a meeting for development but not as a meeting on technology. Information must be turned into an ally to make the development of technological advances an asset that minimized the differences in degree of development between countries, so that they could become elements of development. Inequalities should not be permitted to increase, and his Government therefore supported all efforts to adapt the United Nations internally to the new realities and to ensure that its external work brought results that would benefit the developing countries.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.